

## slavery

Slavery is a societal institution based on ownership, dominance, and exploitation of one human being by another. The owner may exact work or other services without pay and virtually without restriction and can deny the slave freedom of activity and mobility. Generally the owner is responsible only for providing minimal food, shelter, and clothing. The owner may separate members of a family and may permit or deny marriages. A slave is commonly regarded as an article of property, or chattel, and therefore can be sold or given away. Slaves do not come under the jurisdiction of laws that protect citizens, although special regulations may stipulate their treatment and behavior.

Slavery has appeared almost universally throughout history among peoples of every level of material culture—from ancient Greece or the United States in the 19th century to various African and American Indian societies. Slavery is not unique to any particular type of economy. It existed among nomadic pastoralists of Asia, hunting societies of North American Indians, and sea people such as the Norsemen, as well as in settled agricultural groups, although the slaves traditionally served differing functions in these societies. Among agriculturists, where surplus production led to material and cultural advancement, slaves were valued primarily as the major work force in production. Such societies are sometimes referred to as commercial slave societies, exemplified by the Roman Empire and the Old South of the United States, distinguishing them from slave-owning societies, in which slaves were used principally for personal and domestic service, including CONCUBINAGE. The latter type of slavery traditionally existed in parts of the Middle East, Africa, and China. The more sophisticated agricultural societies, however, were able to use slaves most effectively, and in such societies slavery became systematic and highly institutionalized. Although slaves would seem to be a primitive source of energy that would lose importance with the advance of mechanization, the opposite proved true in the United States; the cotton gin, which came into use after 1800, prepared cotton for marketing so rapidly that the demand for slaves increased rather than decreased.

### SLAVERY IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

The legal codes of SUMER provide documentary evidence that slavery existed there as early as the 4th millennium BC. The Sumerian symbol for slave, in cuneiform writing, suggests "foreign."

Slaves were, in fact, almost always of a different ethnic group, race, religion, or political unit than their owners; early custom frowned on enslaving members of an individual's own tribe or kind. The earliest slaves were probably war captives, although debt slaves also existed in ancient Egypt, where a person could sell himself or his wife and children into bondage to liquidate debts.

The Code of Hammurabi, king of Babylonia in the 18th century BC, detailed many laws pertaining to slaves (see HAMMURABI, CODE OF). Slaves were allowed to own property, enter into business, and marry free women; manumission (formal release by the owner) was permitted through either self-purchase or adoption. Nevertheless, even by this humanitarian code the slave was still considered merchandise. In one important respect the code of the HITTITES, in effect in western Asia from 1800 to 1400 BC, was more humane; it conceded that a slave was a human being, although of an inferior order.

Ancient Egyptian society was also heavily dependent on slave labor, and slave owners had absolute rights. Both male and female slaves were marked by shaven heads. The ancient Israelites experienced slavery in Egypt during the second half of the 2d millennium BC. Exodus, the second book of the Old Testament, reports that the Egyptians made the lives of Hebrew slaves "bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field; all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigor." Nowhere does the Old Testament contain outright protest against slavery, however, and the Hebrews themselves adhered to a slave system. The Old Testament stipulated a limit of 7 years to the period of servitude, although the biblical 7-year limit was apparently not always honored.

In the Indus Valley the first documented evidence of slavery coincides with the ARYAN invasion of about 1500 BC. Ancient Indian literature indicates that slavery was sanctioned throughout India from the 6th century BC to the beginning of the Christian era. In ancient Persia slave breeding became a major source of supply in addition to slave acquisition through conquest. Persian victories in the Aegean islands of Chios, Lesbos, and Tenedos resulted in the enslavement of entire populations.

The poems of Homer supply evidence that slavery was an integral part of ancient Greek society, possibly as early as 1200 BC. Greek philosophers questioned slavery as an institution but did not condemn enslavement. Plato opposed enslavement of Greeks by Greeks, regarding bond servants as essentially inferior beings. His pupil Aristotle considered slaves as mere tools, lucky to have the guidance of their masters. Wars, piracy, and debt were

the main sources of slaves for the Greeks. In slave markets of Athens, Rhodes, Corinth, and Delos a thousand slaves might change hands in an afternoon. After a major battle as many as 20,000 captives might go on the block.

Agricultural slaves and state-owned slaves serving in road gangs were sometimes inhumanly treated, but mine slaves were even worse off. At the Laurium silver mines in Attica, for example, from 10,000 to 30,000 slaves were used at a time. Bound in chains, they were forced to work in appalling underground conditions and were brutally flogged. Household slaves, artisan-slaves, slaves in minor official positions, and public slaves who served the temples seem to have been treated with greater leniency. Laws protected them from excessive abuse, but they were nonetheless chattels, without rights in courts of law.

Manumission might be achieved by self-purchase, as a gift for outstanding service, or by bequest in a deceased owner's will. The semilegendary Aesop, teller of fables, is alleged to have been a freed Greek slave of the 6th century BC.

In Roman times, the Carthaginian, Punic, Gallic, and other wars yielded enormous numbers of slaves and produced a slave population eclipsing any in earlier history. By the 1st century BC a kind of agricultural slavery known as estate slavery had developed. Under this system great gangs of slaves labored on wealthy estates, having no contact at all with their owners. Plutarch notes that on a single day in the year 167 BC, 150,000 slaves were sold in a single market. Syria, Galatia, North Africa, and Gaul were the most productive regions in satisfying the needs of the vast slave system. Owners had virtually unrestricted power, and treatment was truly barbaric. Such conditions, combined with the numerical superiority of slaves over free men, inevitably led to large-scale revolts, such as that fomented by the Thracian slave SPARTACUS, who in 73 BC escaped to Sicily and formed an army of 40,000. More merciful treatment of slaves prevailed during the reign of Claudius, at the beginning of the Christian era. Slaves of that period often fared better than poverty-stricken free Romans, and some slaves rose to occupy fairly important positions in government. Their great numerical preponderance, which diluted the mass strength of the free population, is presumed to have contributed eventually to the downfall of the Roman Empire.

## SLAVERY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

As the centralized power and discipline of Rome weakened, agricultural slaves gradually evolved into coloni, or tenant farmers, on large estates. Change of status, however, was more technical than actual because the tenant farmer was perpetually in debt to the landowner and bound to the land and to labor by his debts. The advent of Christianity did not interrupt this or any other slave system because the New Testament, like the Old Testament, did not specifically prohibit slavery. In the Byzantine Empire slavery continued unchecked; slaves served clerics and worked on church property.

By a further gradual evolution as Europe entered the Middle Ages, the coloni became serfs under the manorial system (see MANORIALISM), bound to a lord by a complex system of interrelationships. The serf pledged labor, loyalty, and some material payment in return for protection by the lord of the manor and the use of a piece of land to farm for his own subsistence. As time went on, a serf could by great labor and thrift buy this piece of land and change his status to that of freeman. Slavery, however, was not completely wiped out. Household slavery in particular was fairly widespread. People could still be sold into slavery, generally as a punishment, but the Christian church began to urge manumission. In Russia serfdom prevailed long after the end of the system in Europe; under Peter the Great serfs regressed to the condition of slavery.

In the East slavery was an entrenched institution long before the coming of Muhammad in the 6th century AD, and Islam did not change the situation. The Koran, like the Bible, failed to condemn slavery, although it advocated humane treatment. To liberate a slave was considered a laudable act. Nevertheless, as war followed war, entire populations were reduced to slavery.

During the Crusades, Christians enslaved Muslims. Muslim pirates in the Mediterranean enslaved Christian passengers and sailors captured in raids on shipping. Europeans, outraged by enslavement of white Christians, began to form organizations to seek their release by either force or ransom. In Muslim countries most slaves did relatively easy service as domestics in wealthy households, but a dealer might have slaves emasculated to supply the demand for eunuchs to guard rich men's harems.

## SLAVERY IN THE NEW WORLD

Slavery in Spain and Portugal, long an established institution, had continued throughout the Middle Ages, and the discovery of the New World in the 15th century created an unprecedented demand there for human labor. The

demand was temporarily satisfied by the virtual enslavement of whole indigenous Indian populations from Peru to Central America and Mexico. The Spanish conquistador Hernan CORTES in the early 16th century commented on the vast number of Indian slaves gathered and sold in the Mexican capital. The forced labor systems of ENCOMIENDA and repartimiento instituted by the Hispanic colonists proved neither practical nor satisfactory, however. The Spanish conquerors soon found that the Indians, by reason of physique, tradition, and susceptibility to European diseases, were not ideal slaves. Also, being in their own familiar homeland, escape or revolt was relatively easy for them.

Coincidentally, Portuguese ships exploring and raiding the coasts of Africa found a labor force that promised to transmute the soil of New Spain to gold. Thus began the importation of black Africans to the New World as slaves. Ironically, the humanitarian reforms urged by Bartolome de LAS CASAS to mitigate the sufferings of encomienda Indians undoubtedly contributed to the sufferings of their substitutes, the imported Africans. Selected for youth and strength, those Africans who survived the pestilential voyage across the ocean were generally healthy and immune from disease. Naturally, they were in great demand as slaves on plantations. The British, French, and Dutch, as well as the Spanish and Portuguese, put blacks to work on the great sugar plantations, the loci of a particularly cruel form of slavery. In Puerto Rico the Indians in these plantation areas were annihilated. In Brazil, under the Portuguese colonizers, the great coffee and sugar plantations demanded a large, constant supply of slaves. Indigenous peoples were pursued far into the jungles of the interior, captured, and barbarously treated. As the Indian population diminished under these terrible conditions, slaves brought from Africa replaced them. Thus the slave trade in the New World, with its ever-increasing markets, rapidly expanded into an enormous and highly lucrative industry.

### The African Slave Trade

Slavery had been common for centuries in African tribes, as in other tribal societies (see AFRICA, HISTORY OF). Slaves were usually captives taken in raids or wars. They enhanced the power and wealth of tribal chiefs. When European slave ships first appeared along the African coast, chiefs met them at the shore to barter human wealth for merchandise such as weapons, ammunition, metal, liquor, trinkets, and cloth. The slavers bought only the finest physical specimens, partly because they would be worth more at their destinations and partly because only the youngest and healthiest had a good chance of reaching their destinations alive. Conditions aboard ship were dreadful. The maximum number of slaves was jammed into the hull, chained to forestall revolts or suicides by drowning. Food, ventilation, light, and sanitation were the minimum necessary to keep the cargo alive and often not enough to do that. Mortality ran as high as 20 percent. When an outbreak of smallpox or dysentery occurred, the stricken were cast overboard.

### Slavery in the English Colonies

The first slaves to arrive in the English colonies in America, about 20 in number, were put ashore at JAMESTOWN, Va., in 1619. At that time the Africans were classed with white indentured servants brought from England under work contracts. Decades passed before blacks in any significant number were brought to the colonies; in the main, they replaced escaped or freed indentured servants.

The Indian tribes who lived in and near the English colonies seemed natural subjects for enslavement, as had the Indians in Spanish America. Indian slavery was attempted, but Indians did not make as satisfactory slaves as blacks. For one thing, they were less accustomed to the settled agriculture at which they were expected to labor. Also, although some Indian groups, including the AZTEC and MAYA and the CHEROKEE, CHINOOK, NATCHEZ, and NOOTKA, had practiced slavery themselves, their variety was generally even less like the chattel slavery of the colonies than was the domestic and political slavery of the Africans. Perhaps most importantly, Indians in America were not bewildered foreigners, weakened and cowed by the terrible experience of being transported to a new world. Indians were in their own homeland, where they were organized into tribes and nations; they were not so few and scattered as the Africans in the early decades of the colonies but were in a position to rise up and kill those who tried to deprive them of their liberty. By the time the colonists were sufficiently numerous and organized to enforce slavery on the Indians, an easier solution was presented by the ever larger number of more helpless black foreigners put on the block and sold like animals by the slave traders.

### The Triangle Trade

As the plantation system developed in the congenial climate of the southern colonies, the advantages of the "peculiar institution" of slavery became increasingly apparent to planters. Demand for slaves to cultivate crops of tobacco and, farther south, rice and sugarcane stimulated a systematized traffic in slaves called the triangular



trade. Ships leaving England with trade goods touched first at the west coast of Africa and sold their merchandise for African blacks. After the notorious "Middle Passage" from Africa, the next stop was either the West Indies, where slaves were in demand on plantations, or the English colonies; at this stop the slaves were exchanged for such agricultural products as sugar. The return voyage to England with a valuable cargo completed the triangle.

As the trade developed, New England ports became a regular stop before the homeward crossing; there, sugar and molasses acquired at earlier stops were in demand for the manufacture of rum. The point on which the triangular trade precariously balanced was the African slave, who was a source of wealth to tribal chiefs, to the shipping business, to plantation owners in the South, and to merchants and shipbuilders in the North. A trade profitable to so many was bound to grow. An estimated 8 to 15 million Africans reached the Americas from the 16th through the 19th century, with a peak of about 6 million arriving in the 18th century alone. As the number of slaves increased, rebellions also increased (see GABRIEL, slave; TURNER, NAT; VESEY, DENMARK). Punishment was severe, ranging from branding and maiming to hanging. (See also BLACK AMERICANS.)

## OPPOSITION TO SLAVERY

The first organized opposition to slavery in the American colonies came from the Quakers (see FRIENDS, SOCIETY OF), who made their first statement against slavery as early as 1724. Although slave markets existed in both the North and South, an increasing number of colonists regarded slavery as unnecessary and undesirable. Individual states abolished slavery, beginning with Rhode Island in 1774, but the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1788, provided for the continuance of the slave trade for another 20 years. Slavery was so tightly woven into the fabric of the country's agricultural and commercial life that to most people abolition seemed unthinkable. Slavery was excluded from the Northwest Territory by the Ordinance of 1787, but whatever was gained by this action seemed nullified by the vastly increased demand for field hands to raise and pick cotton as Eli Whitney's cotton gin, invented in 1793, came into general use. The value of a strong, young male slave rose from \$500 in the early 1830s to \$1,800 in the late 1850s.

In Britain, following a rising antislavery movement led by abolitionists William WILBERFORCE and Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846), the British Parliament outlawed (1807) the slave trade, authorizing search and seizure of suspect ships and payment for the liberation of slaves. In 1833, Britain entirely outlawed slavery. As South American countries won their independence, they too made slavery illegal; debt peonage, however, often took its place. By 1840, Spain and Portugal had officially abolished traffic in slaves, but Portuguese ships continued their crossings, remaining a major source of smuggled slaves throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

In the United States, antislavery feeling achieved significant momentum in 1831 with the publication of *The Liberator*, the abolitionist newspaper of William Lloyd GARRISON. The formal founding of the ABOLITIONIST movement came with the inauguration of the American Anti-Slavery Society in Philadelphia in 1833; by 1840 the UNDERGROUND RAILROAD was active in helping slaves escape to the North, to freedom. As the tide of protest to slavery mounted, abolitionists were condemned and persecuted. New converts, however, raised a public outcry, spurred on by the annexation of Texas (1845), which created a huge new slave state; the FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW (1850); the violence caused by the KANSAS-NEBRASKA Act (1854); and the John BROWN raid on Harper's Ferry (1859). Books such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* stimulated antislavery sentiment in the North, but apart from opposing the further spread of slavery, few actively supported abolition until it became the major issue in the presidential campaign of Abraham LINCOLN. Lincoln summed up the political, if not the humanitarian, problem of slavery in his speech accepting the presidential nomination, saying that the nation could not survive half-slave and half-free. The U.S. CIVIL WAR was fought partly over the issue of slavery, a war that resulted in almost 900,000 casualties and indescribable suffering for many more. The slaves of the Confederacy were declared free during the war by Lincoln's EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION (1863). With the passing of the 13TH AMENDMENT (1865) slavery was constitutionally abolished in the United States.

## SLAVERY DURING THE 20TH CENTURY

Although the United States had put an end to slavery as that institution is here defined, a form of it persisted in tenant farming, debt peonage, and migrant labor, in the sense of work contracts that yield the worker little or no profit from labor or leave the worker perpetually in debt to the employer. In North America, blacks, Hispanics, and Mexicans suffer the most from such systems. Elsewhere in the world, notably in parts of Africa, Asia, and South America, these and more literal forms of slavery persist. The Anti-Slavery Society for the Protection of Human Rights in London estimates that debt bondage (in which impoverished, illiterate people work for very low wages, borrow money from their employers, and pledge their labor as security), serfdom that is called contract labor, sham adoptions, servile forms of marriage, and other forms of servitude still oppress more than 200 million poor people

in the developing world. In the late 1980s the society concentrated its efforts to improve the lot of such people in South and Southeast Asia because of the magnitude of child-labor servitude there. The society estimated that 50 million children in India alone were being exploited. The sale of children into bondage and the self-sale of impoverished persons also continue in Asia. In some Asian nations there are young people of both sexes living in enforced prostitution; they are kept illiterate and deprived of all personal rights.

Saudi Arabia and Angola abolished slavery officially only in the 1960s. Although legal slavery by then had probably ceased to exist, some Berber peoples continued to own slaves until at least 1975, and elsewhere forms of involuntary servitude undoubtedly persist.

The 20th century has nevertheless made some forward strides toward human freedom through international organizations. The League of Nations, formed following World War I, set up machinery for international cooperation toward putting an end to slavery everywhere. The League's successor, the United Nations, has continued and expanded the work of the League. Its Declaration of Human Rights (1945) specifically prohibits slavery and the slave trade, and the Security Council has condemned forced labor. Perhaps more important than any declaration or agreement opposing slavery is the work of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, and the World Health Organization. These international bodies attack the conditions of hunger, weakness, and ignorance that perpetuate the institution of slavery.

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